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SUBJECT: ARAB LEAGUE BRIEFING FOLLOWING SEPTEMBER 5
MINISTERIAL

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¶1. Summary. In a briefing for foreign diplomats on the Arab League's (AL) annual September 5 ministerial, AL Chief of Staff Hisham Youssef said that the ministers confirmed their support for President Bush's proposed international meeting for Middle East peace and noted their strong desire to reach a "milestone" before the end of the current U.S. administration. The AL wants to see a "comprehensive approach" that does not exclude any "parties, tracks, or issues," supports the Abbas government, and stands ready to assist in turning over "institutions and premises" under Hamas control back to the Palestinian Authority, he said. End summary.

Peace Process

¶2. AL Chief of Staff Hisham Youssef, in a briefing for foreign diplomats on September 11, reiterated that AL foreign ministers confirmed their support for President Bush's proposed meeting for Middle East peace in their September 5 annual ministerial (reftel). Ministers stressed a comprehensive approach that does not exclude any "parties, tracks, or issues," calling for Syrian participation and discussion of the status of Jerusalem and refugees. Youssef also called for an Israeli moratorium on settlements and separation barrier construction as a show of good faith. The Arab Peace Initiative committee is preparing the Arab position regarding the details of what should occur during President Bush's proposed international meeting and will meet with the Quartet on September 23 in New York. AL ministers also called upon Egypt and Saudi Arabia to continue playing an active role in the peace process. Youssef stressed that "we must reach a milestone" before the current U.S. administration ends its term.

¶3. On the internal Palestinian issue, Youssef noted the legitimacy of the Abbas government and stated that the AL supports a return to the pre-June Hamas take-over of Gaza "status quo," standing ready to assist in turning over institutions under Hamas control back to the Palestinian Authority. However, this does not mean a return to the Haniya National Unity Government.

Iraq

¶4. The AL established a new fund to assist member countries to deal with increasing numbers of displaced Iraqis living within their borders, said Youssef. He noted that Syria reports a 10 percent increase in its overall population due to Iraqis fleeing since the start of the Iraq conflict, and that Iraq itself will donate USD 25 million to the fund.

Lebanon

¶5. The AL called for the Lebanese presidential election to be conducted in accordance with the Lebanese constitution, and for the formation of a National Unity Government.

Sudan and Somalia

¶6. The AL praised United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1769 and the meeting in Arusha, Tanzania, between Darfur rebel groups, as positive developments in Sudan, and continues to call on all factions to sign the Darfur Peace Agreement. Similarly, the AL ministers called on all factions to join the reconciliation process in Somalia. Youssef noted that the AL continues to work closely with the UN and AU on both these issues.

Expanding Relations Outside the Arab World

¶7. To continue to develop its relationships with non-Arabs, the AL will convene several summits with African nations and the EU, said Youssef. With China, the AL expects to hold a conference on energy as well as a "dialogue of civilizations." The AL is currently in the process of developing a framework for a dialogue with Turkey. The AL noted the importance of the U.S.-AL relationship, and looks forward to the third Arab-U.S. forum in May 2008 in New York.

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